

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2016*

**Remarks in Detroit, Michigan**

*January 20, 2016*

*The President.* Hello, Detroit! Oh, it's good to be back in Michigan, even though it might be just a little cold here. *[Laughter]* But I'm from Chicago, so I'm used to it.

A couple people I want to start off by introducing. First of all, Detroit is coming back, and everybody deserves credit for that. But one person who deserves special credit for it is your mayor, Mike Duggan. He's doing an outstanding job. So we're very proud of him. You've got four outstanding Members of Congress: Debbie Dingell; the "Dean"—John Conyers; Brenda Lawrence; Sandy Levin. We've got one of the finest Congressmen who ever served and a great friend of Detroit; John Dingell is here. There he is.

And a dear friend of mine—we drove over together. And I was just telling my team, when I was running for the United States Senate—not for the President—when I was running for the United States Senate and nobody knew who I was and nobody could pronounce my name—*[laughter]*—the regional leader of the UAW in Illinois was a guy named Dennis Williams. And he was my friend and supporter before just about anybody else out there. And then, when I ran for President, by that time, we'd made some great friends in the UAW, and so I just want to say how proud I am to call him a friend. Your UAW president, Dennis Williams.

And give it up for Cindy for that outstanding introduction.

*Audience member.* My mom!

*The President.* That's your mom?

*Audience member.* That's my mom.

*The President.* That's her—are you proud of your mom?

*Audience member.* I'm very proud of my mom!

*The President.* Oh, look at that. Well, you're, like, out of a TV show. What, are you, like, a child actor or something? Look at him. He's all handsome, all yeah. *[Laughter]* All right, Cindy, he's a pretty impressive young man.

I want to pick up briefly on something that Cindy said, and that is just to talk for a second about what's happening in Flint. I am very proud of what I've done as President, but the only job that's more important to me is the job of father. And I know that if I was a parent up there, I would be beside myself that my kids' health could be at risk. And that's why, over the weekend, I declared a Federal emergency in Flint to send more resources on top of the assistance that we've already put on the ground. We've designated a Federal coordinator to make sure the people of Flint get what they need from their country.

Yesterday I met with Mayor Weaver in the White House, in the Oval Office, and I told her that we are going to have her back and all the people of Flint's back as they work their way through this terrible tragedy. It is a reminder of why you can't shortchange basic services that we provide to our people and that we, together, provide as a government to make sure that the public health and safety is preserved.

But I have come to Detroit for another reason as well. I already drive in a great American car, which we affectionately know as the Beast. *[Laughter]* Next year, I've got to give it up. I'm saying goodbye to the Beast. So I figured that I needed to do a little browsing now at the Detroit Auto Show. I know they've got auto shows in Paris and Frankfurt and Tokyo. But there's only one Motor City. There's only one Detroit. And if you're looking for the world's best cars and the workers who make those cars, you need to be in Detroit, Michigan. That's why I'm here.

*Audience member.* CT6!

*The President.* He said the GT6—CT6. All right.

*Audience member.* Get that!

*The President.* Well, I'm looking at all of them now. *[Laughter]*

*Audience member.* You get that Ford. *[Laughter]*

*Audience members.* *[Inaudible]*

*The President.* All right, I've got the idea. I'm not going to tell you all what I'm buying now. *[Laughter]*

*Audience member.* Jeep Grand Cherokee! *[Laughter]*

*The President.* Now, I will say, the Cherokee was my car—first new car I ever bought. Somebody was asking me—I didn't get a new car until I was, like, 32. *[Laughter]* I always had an old, beat-up hoopty. *[Laughter]* But my first brand-new car with the brand-new car smell was a Jeep Cherokee. And I thought I was a bad man once I was in that car. *[Laughter]* I was all up high, looking at the road. Man. *[Laughter]*

I could not be prouder of this industry and the road that we've traveled together. And I'm proud of each and every one of you. Think about what you've fought through. It wasn't that long ago that a crisis that started on Wall Street sparked a great recession on Main Street, and it cost millions of Americans their jobs, their homes, the savings that they had worked a lifetime to build. Nearly one in five autoworkers got a pink slip, laid off from a job in an iconic industry that had been a ticket to the middle class for generations. And across the Midwest, plants closed with little hope of reopening.

So the American auto industry, the beating heart of American manufacturing, was flatlining. That's where we were when I took office 7 years ago today. The year before I took office, the auto industry had laid off 400,000 people—400,000. And we had a choice to make.

With the economy in a freefall, the markets frozen, there were no private companies, there were no private investors who were going to step up and take a chance on you. So we could have kept on handing over billions of taxpayer dollars to automakers, but things didn't change and it just got worse—that would have just kicked the can down the road. Or we could have done nothing, thrown in the towel, walked away from this industry entirely. And a lot of folks suggested we do that. They'd deny it later, but that's what they said at the time.

*Audience member.* But not you!

*The President.* Think about what that would have meant for America. GM and Chrysler would not exist today. Suppliers and distributors that get their business from those companies would have died off. And when that happened, Ford could have gone down too. Because those supplier chains are vital to all three industries—or all three companies. Production stopped.

Factories shuttered. Proud companies chopped up, sold off for scraps. And all of you, the men and women who built these companies with your hands, would have been hung out to dry.

More than 1 million Americans would have lost their jobs at the worst possible time. Not just autoworkers, but the people in communities that depend on you: the teachers who teach your kids, the small-business owners who know your name. Their livelihoods were at stake as well.

And so we decided we're not going to let that happen, and we came up with another option. In exchange for help, we demanded responsibility. We said that the auto industry would have to truly change, not just pretend like it was changing. The industry retooled, it restructured. Management and labor got together to settle your differences. Everybody put some skin in the game. Everybody sacrificed for the sake and survival of this industry.

And it wasn't popular. It wasn't even popular in Detroit. [*Laughter*] Wasn't even popular in Michigan. But I said at the time, I didn't run for President to be popular. I ran for President to do what needed to be done. And I placed my bet on you. And after visiting auto plants across the Midwest and seeing what you have done firsthand, let me tell you, I'd make that same bet any day of the week. Because today, factories are humming, business is booming, the American auto industry is all the way back—all the way back.

Seven years ago, auto sales hit a 27-year-low. Last year, they hit an alltime high. Across the country, workers who thought that they'd never make another car again can't make them fast enough. You guys see it. New shifts are coming on. The Big Three are starting to boost wages. Since our plan kicked in, the American auto industry has added more than 640,000 new jobs. And because everybody came together and everybody worked together, not only are you producing more cars, but they're some of the most high-tech, most fuel-efficient, best looking cars in the world. They're designed and engineered and forged and built right here in the United States of America.

And because the auto industry came back, that obviously gave the capacity for Detroit to start coming back. So you've now cut the city's unemployment rate by more than half. Folks aren't writing off Detroit anymore. Starting 5 years ago, I sent some of my top people across the Federal Government to help City Hall and ordinary citizens to spark that comeback here in Motor City. So today, you've got buses that are running again, streets that are well lit again, new homes and businesses getting off the ground again. There's still plenty of work to do, but you can feel the difference. You can feel something special happening in Detroit.

I stopped by a restaurant to have lunch with the mayor and a good friend of mine, Tom, who has started Shinola here, and one of you outstanding autoworkers, and an emergency room doctor. What was that restaurant's name?

*Audience member.* The Jolly Pumpkin!

*The President.* The Jolly Pumpkin. It was—that was tasty stuff. [*Laughter*] And then, I went over to Shinola and—now, I already had this Shinola watch. It's a good-looking watch. Made right here. And for you who don't know the story of Shinola and how it started—a factory here in Detroit and hiring folks who had never been involved in manufacturing before, and now it's got over 500 employees, and it's shipping these spiffy-looking watches and bicycles and belts and wallets and purses. And this is some good-looking stuff.

And the people who work there—we were talking about how there was a woman who was homeless, got a job there as a janitor, is now the supervisor of one of the assembly processes

over there to make the watches. Completely turned her life around. Well, that's the story of Detroit when you give people a chance, when you have confidence in what we can do together.

And so what's true of Detroit is true of the country. And that's part of the reason I came here. I'm shopping for a car—[*laughter*—but right now I want people to remember how far we've come. And it's not—I'm not running for office again. The reason I want to remind people is not because I'm on the ticket, it's because I want America to have confidence in where we can go.

This was—I talked about this at the State of the Union Address. Seven years ago, we put in place new plans to help hard-working families get back on their feet. We put folks back to work rebuilding roads and bridges. We passed big, new, middle class tax cuts. We asked the wealthiest Americans, who were doing fine, even through the recession, to pay a little bit more, we—pay their fair share. We rethought our health care system. We reinvented our energy sector. We put in place the toughest Wall Street reforms in history. And today, businesses like this one have added more than 14 million new jobs. This has been the longest streak of job creation in our history—in our history.

The United States of America right now has the strongest, most durable economy in the world. We're doing so much better than other folks are doing. The American economy right now is 10 percent bigger than it was at its peak, before the financial crisis. In Europe, it hasn't gotten back to where it was back in 2007, 2008.

*Audience member.* Thank you, Mr. President!

*The President.* We've added more jobs than almost all the other advanced countries combined during this period.

So when you hear people—I won't say who—but when you hear people—[*laughter*—claiming that America is in decline, they don't know what they're talking about. They're peddling fiction during a political season. And it's strange to watch people try to outdo each other in saying how bad things are. When one says our economy is terrible, the next says it's terrible and on fire and covered in bees. [*Laughter*] And they'll just come up with stuff. They're racing to see who can talk down America the most.

But remember—and this is why I want everybody to remember—these are the same folks who would have let this industry go under. These are the—some of the same folks who back in Washington called our plan to save the auto industry "the road to socialism," said it was going to be a "disaster," said, "They'll run it into the ground." Those are quotes, by the way. I'm not making that up. Look it up. [*Laughter*] And so when I hear today some of these folks running for President, who can't bring themselves to admit what you guys have accomplished, I don't want you to take that seriously. Because when you ignore the progress we've made, then you're not going to make good choices about where we need to go in the future.

If they're still trying to spin a tale that the auto rescue was a bad idea, the same folks who predicted that you'd fail, they had other predictions about policies too. They predicted gas prices would hit \$6.50 a gallon. I don't know what you all are paying right now, but it ain't no \$6.50. In most places, it's \$2 or less. On the way here, we saw gas for less than 2 bucks. But that's what they said: It's going to be \$6.50.

Then, they predicted, "Oh, the deficits are going to go way, way up." We cut our deficits by almost three quarters. They've been below average for the past 40 years. They said, "We'll

get unemployment to 6 percent by 2016." Well, we got it down to 5 about a year ahead of schedule—of their schedule.

This is the crowd that was dead set against betting on you and your hard work and your professionalism and your skills. They've somehow still convinced themselves that cutting taxes for folks at the very top is going to help you succeed. I think there's a better plan. By the way, they said when I—when we raise taxes on the folks at the very top who had been doing great, they said, "Oh, well, that's going to kill jobs." And guess what, 70 months straight of job creation now. Just like they said when Obamacare passed, "Oh, that's going to be terrible"—18 million people with health insurance who didn't have it before.

So, now, this is not to make an argument for complacency. I'm not suggesting we should be satisfied where we are. Because what is true is, the economy has been changing in profound ways for the last 20, 30 years. You've all seen it. Technology has made it easier to replace jobs on the assembly line. That's been going on for a long time. Any job where work can be automated is in danger of being replaced. The attacks on unions have been going on for a long time. And when union participation is down, workers have less leverage to get a raise.

The fact that companies can move because of increased technology means more global competition. And all these trends have squeezed workers, even when they've got jobs, even when the economy is growing, which means that a lot of Americans sometimes feel anxious. And that tells us we've got more work to do. But as I said at the State of the Union, if we're going to solve those problems for working families and middle class families, for your neighbors, for your friends, for your kids, your grandkids, then we've got to have smart answers, not just a bunch of fantasies that end up helping the folks who don't need help.

In this economy, we've got to make sure that everybody who works hard has a chance at opportunity and security. And real opportunity in this new economy means every American has got to get the education and training they need to land a good-paying job. I know that any of your fathers or grandfathers who worked in an auto plant, they wouldn't recognize a plant today. It's just entirely different. And you've got to know computers, and you've got to have skills that didn't even exist a generation ago. So that means that we've got to really make sure our kids are properly trained.

And the good news is, last year, our high school graduation rate reached another alltime high. And we've got to build on that progress with early childhood education for every child that needs it so they get a good start, and computer and math classes to make kids job-ready in this new economy. And we should recruit and support and pay properly great teachers for our kids. We've got to make college affordable for every American. And college doesn't mean necessarily a 4-year degree. It might mean a community college. It might mean a technical school. But we—you're going to need more than just high school, which is why I've laid out a plan to provide 2 years of community college at no cost for every responsible student. I'm going to fight to get that done, to get that moving this year.

Then, we've got to think about real security. Now, this is a union facility. So you know the importance of secure health benefits and secure retirement benefits. But not everybody in this new economy has that. So real security in this new economy, in addition to encouraging workers to join together so they have a voice and some leverage, also means benefits and protections you can count on.

When Social Security and Medicare are more than—important than ever, we shouldn't weaken Social Security and Medicare, we should strengthen Social Security and Medicare. For

Americans that are short of retirement, benefits should be mobile, like everything else. That's what we did with the Affordable Care Act. The idea with the Affordable Care Act was not to replace employer-based care, but it was to say, if you lost your job—as some of you did—and you tried to buy it on COBRA, and it was so expensive, you couldn't even think about it; or if you decided you wanted to go back to school for more training; or let's say you decided you wanted to start a new business, you had a chance to still get some coverage at a reasonable price and good quality. And as I said, 18 million people have gained coverage so far.

So now we should make sure that when folks lose their job, the system works for them. For example, they should be able to get unemployment insurance that encourages retraining for a business that's ready to hire. And if a new job doesn't pay as much, there should be a system of wage insurance in place so that folks, if they take a job with the hope of retraining and ultimately getting a better job, in the meantime they can still pay their bills. And if you take a part-time job or a temporary job before you get—find that full-time job, you'd have some insurance, some cushion. And when folks are going from job to job, they should still be able to save for retirement and take their savings with them. See, all that would make this new economy work better for everybody.

Now, even as we work to secure real opportunity and secure—and security for working families, we've also got to make sure that the system is not rigged against working families. Now, GM, Ford, Chrysler—those are all great companies. Shinola is a great company. I believe in private enterprise. I believe in the incredible dynamism of the American economy, and that's business. And we're—America's business is business. We love business.

But after years of corporate profits, we also have to make sure that business is sharing what it makes with the workers who make it. And that's the American way. I mean, Henry Ford used to talk about, I've got to pay my workers enough so they can buy my cars. That's good for business. And so working families are not going to get more opportunity or bigger paychecks by letting big banks or big oil or hedge funds write their own rules and do whatever they want. They're—you're not helping middle class families by allowing a tax on collective bargaining to go unanswered. And I'm not going to back down on my belief that we've got to have strong rules to protect the air that our kids breathe and the water that they drink. It is more important than ever.

And by the way, I should just point out that the auto industry here in the United States has figured out that we can make more fuel-efficient cars that reduce the carbon pollution that's causing climate change and make a profit and put more people to work. There's no contradiction between creating jobs and economic growth and caring for the environment.

And in this new economy, workers and parents and startups and small businesses, they need more of a voice, not less. So this year, I'm going to lift up some of the businesses who have figured this out: what it means to do right by your workers and the fact that that's good for your bottom line. A lot of our best corporate citizens are also our most creative and our most innovative. And in this new economy, it's that spirit of creativity and innovation that we need more than ever.

So you've got to be thinking about the future, not just the past. And that's what you're doing here in Detroit. You're not just making cars that people want today, you're thinking about cars that people are going to want tomorrow. When I was over at the auto show, I saw plug-in hybrids and electrics and fuel-efficient cars that can protect our planet, save people money at the pump. You're working on self-driving cars that one day could prevent accidents and save lives. This year, my administration is going to take steps to get more of those cars on

the road. Right here at GM and UAW, we're teaming up to train American workers for the good-paying jobs of the future.

That's the kind of spirit that's going to lead us forward, that says we're all in it together, we've all got a stake in each other's success. It doesn't always get a lot of attention. But all across this country, if you just look for it, all kinds of good things are happening. And all the division and yelling and rudeness and controversy that gets spun up and manufactured, that's not who we are. That's not how we live on a day-to-day basis. You don't—at your workplace, everybody is on the same team trying to get the job done. You might have a disagreement; you try to figure it out. You don't start shouting. You don't start saying, well, I like those kind of people, but not those kind of folks.

And by the way, the UAW, part of the reason it succeeded was, it was one of the first unions to realize that we're all in this together and didn't divide people up. You look at the history of the UAW: It was one of the first unions to say, no, we're going to take everybody. If you're working hard, if you're doing the right thing, trying to raise your family, we're going to be better off if we're hand in hand trying to make sure workers get a fair deal, even if we don't look like each other, even if we don't all worship at the same place. That's what built the UAW. That's what built America. *[Applause]* That's what built America.

But I see it all across the country. I see it in the Leathers family from Sterling Heights. So Steve Leathers—I just want to tell a quick story here—works for a company called Empire Wire and Supply. And during the crisis, they had to lay off nearly 20 percent of their workers. So Steve's friends were losing their jobs. His neighbors were losing their homes. So one night, he tells his wife if things didn't get better, they might have to leave too.

Steve didn't know it at the time, but his 13-year-old daughter, Brianna, heard what he said—because, I've discovered, kids hear everything. So you all got to watch what you say around your kids. They'll repeat it back to you, sometimes, 10 years later. *[Laughter]* So without telling her dad, Brianna sat down and she wrote me a letter. Thirteen years old. She said, "Dear President Obama, I am 13 years old, and I am worried about my family's future in Michigan. My dad," she wrote, "works for a company that manufactures cables for the automotive companies. This industry isn't doing so well, but these guys are still doing okay."

So Brianna is here today. Where's Brianna? Wave. There you are, right there. She's older now. So Brianna is 13 years old now—or she's 19 years old now. This was 6 years ago. She's a young lady. She's working her way through Macomb Community College. Her twin brother, Brendan—is that Brendan right next to her? He's at Oakland University, half hour away. Dad is still in Michigan—that's dad. But today, Steve's future is very different.

But before the crisis, Steve's company had about 110 employees. Today, they've got nearly 200. Brianna says—she's looking back, and she says: "I remember a lot of people getting laid off. They all have jobs now." Steve remembers what it was like back then; there was a panic. Now, he says, I'm 110-percent confident we're going in the right direction.

Now, Steve and his family, they're just one example. But those stories are multiplying all across the country. We don't hear a lot about them. They don't get on TV. You won't always read about them in the newspapers. Sometimes, we take it for granted.

But I remember. And I read Brianna's letters. And that's why I've got so much confidence in the future—because of you. I know that we've got young students like Brianna and Brendan. I know we've got workers like Steve who've proven that we're tougher than any kind of times that we might face. I'm confident because every one of you who clock in every day and work as

hard as you can, not just for your own sake, but for the sake of this industry and for the sake of the country and because you take pride in what you do. And when you see that car rolling down the highway and you know, "Hey, I built that thing," and you know it's a great product, and it gives you a sense of being part of something bigger, that makes me confident about the future.

I'm hopeful about our future because of every single American that I've met who never stopped believing that the people who love this country can change it for the better. You are what makes America great. And I want you to know that I have faith in you. And when I leave this office, I'll still have faith in you. And every day that I have the privilege of holding this office, I'm going to have faith in you.

And we're going to work side by side to make sure more folks got jobs and more folks got better wages and benefits and more people have the ability to join a union when they want to and more people are able to start businesses and more people have health benefits and more companies are thriving. And this country is going to keep on moving forward. And I know it's going to happen because of you.

Thank you, Detroit. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:49 p.m. at the UAW–GM Center for Human Resources. In his remarks, he referred to Cindy Estrada, vice president, International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), and her son Jason White; former Rep. John D. Dingell, Jr.; Nicole Lurie, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Department of Health and Human Services; Tom Kartsotis, founder, Shinola; Teana Dowdell, employee, General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly facility; and Tolulope Sonuyi, physician, Henry Ford Health System.

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*Locations:* Detroit, MI.

*Names:* Conyers, John J., Jr.; Dingell, Deborah A.; Dingell, John D., Jr.; Dowdell, Teana; Duggan, Michael E.; Estrada, Cindy; Kartsotis, Tom; Lawrence, Brenda L.; Leathers, Brendan; Leathers, Brianna; Leathers, Steve; Levin, Sander M.; Lurie, Nicole; Sonuyi, Tolulope; Weaver, Karen Williams; White, Jason; Williams, Dennis.

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